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REPORT
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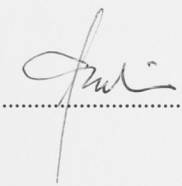
ABSTRACT

CLAIMING TITLE

The presentation of the thesis comprises the Studio Practice component, which takes the form of an exhibition of paintings held at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from 22 March to 28 March 2002, and the Report, which documents the nature and development of the research undertaken during the course of the study, together with the Dissertation component (33%). The Studio Practice component has been based in the Painting Workshop, and has examined the topic through paintings concerning the cross-cultural encounter which is the beginning of the European colonisation of Australia in 1788. The Dissertation concerns the origins, development and reception of Pintupi Painting and considers the implications, in terms of cross -cultural understanding and esteem, of what may be another act of colonisation.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Graham Mclean Eadie, hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project I have undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the sources of ideas, references, quotations or paraphrases attributable to other authors



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I thank Robert Boynes and Deborah Singleton of the painting workshop at the Canberra School of Art for their constructive criticism and guidance over a number of years. I also thank Gordon Bull, Mary Roberts and Roger Benjamin of the Art Theory Workshop who have successively supervised my dissertation.

Other Acknowledgements
I acknowledge the help and encouragement which Ruth Waller and Noel Ford of the painting workshop have given me with my education as a painter and I am grateful to my fellow students for their friendship.

Above all I thank my wife, Joy, for her unfailing support.

ILLUSTRATIONS

STUDIO REPORT

Issues

My overall concern is with cross-cultural communication. The problem of establishing mutual understanding and respect between European and Aboriginal Australians is of particular interest to me as a European Australian.

In 1788 Aboriginal Australia was invaded and shortly thereafter an undeclared war began, in which, with great inequality of military technology and without any formalities, the Aboriginal population of south eastern Australia was defeated and everything that had previously been theirs, with the exception of minor personal possessions, was taken from them. In the case of land, large tracts were placed permanently in the hands of aliens. With hindsight it is easy to see the injustice that was done to the Aborigines. The context of late 18th and 19th century imperialism obscured this perception.

The relatively recent dispossession of the Aborigines is a central social issue with which Australia, as a settler society, has yet to deal. Acceptance of this history involves acknowledging the injustice hidden at the beginning of our national story. The history we accept becomes part of the way we see, and conditions what we are able to see. The history we believe serves to screen us from other less palatable accounts of events. It is the screen on which reified ideologies are projected.

Politics and Painting

My aim has been to make work which is politically relevant, but which is grounded in aesthetic pleasure and interest at the same time. It is concerned with human social values which are materialist, but the means by which I seek to give them form involve values which are fundamentally metaphysical. I hope to communicate by drawing viewers in with visual delights and leaving them to contemplate meaning.

It is important to me that the work should not become overly didactic. The paintings should not be illustrations of their concerns, although they have to give expression to those concerns. They must not abdicate in favour of the word: text should be oblique in its address to the images and issues. Viewers must be given sufficient information for access, but be allowed space in which to resolve for themselves the meaning(s) of the work. If text is to be used it must be subordinated in some way. The stencilled words in *PERIFERIQUE* of 1989 and the embalming recipe in *Model Seven (from room for error)* of 1993 in the work of Susan Norrie are cases in point.

Source Materials

I sought a general understanding of the social and political background of eighteenth century European, and particularly British imperialism, through such works as J H Plumb's The First Four Georges, Russel Ward's Finding Australia, and the early sections of C M H Clark's Select Documents in Australian History 1788 - 1850. I then turned my attention to accounts of the first contact between European settlers and the Aborigines, beginning with a general history of the

early period of European settlement, Alan Atkinson's The Europeans in Australia. I also read the personal reminiscences of Watkin Tench edited by Tim Flannery, and Sydney Cove 1788 , a compilation by John Cobley from journals, diaries and letters, giving a day-by-day account of the first year of settlement. Keith Vincent Smith's Bennelong was also useful. There is no recorded contemporaneous Aboriginal version of events. These sources suggested to me that the moments of first meeting contained the major elements which continue to bedevil the European/Aboriginal cross-cultural encounter to the present day, compounded and disguised as they may be by the technology of modern life. In addition to this work, I read extensively the literature about the Western Desert Aborigines and their painting in preparing my dissertation concerning the paintings of the Pintupi, a Western Desert people, involved in the dot painting movement that had its inception at Papunya in the early 1970s.

The first encounter between a landing party under the command of Lieutenant Gidley King (later Governor of the colony), then a young man of thirty, and the Port Jackson natives was in King's account charged with comedy, but also tinged with sadness when one reflects on whether this was the best that could be done.

> They wanted to know of what sex we were, which they explained by pointing where it was distinguishable. As they took us for women, not having our beard grown, I ordered one of the people to undeceive them in this particular, when they made a great shout of admiration, and pointing to the shore, which was but ten yards from us, we saw a great number of Women & Girls, with infant children on their shoulders, make their appearance on the beach - all in *puris naturalibus, pas meme la feuille de figueur.* Those natives who were around the boats made signs for us to go to them & made us understand their persons were at our service. However, I declined this mark of their hospitality but shewed a handkerchief, which I offered to one of the women, pointing her out. She immediately put her child down & came alongside the boat and suffered me to apply the handkerchief where Eve did the fig leaf; the natives then set up another very great shout & my female visitor returned on shore. As the evening was coming on fast and we were twelve miles from the fleet, it was time to return. We wished the natives good be wi' ye, which they repeated. We got on board about midnight.[1]

This passage is quite surreal in its knowing innocence, as is another in which the young Surgeon White gives his handkerchief to a native woman to tie around her head, and a third in which he decorates the head, neck and arms of a female Aboriginal companion with strips of cloth torn from his pocket and neck handkerchiefs,

> Having nothing left, except the buttons of my coat, on her admiring them, I cut them away, and with a piece of string tied them round her waist. Thus ornamented, and thus delighted with her new acquirements, she turned from me with a look of inexpressible archness.[2]

So much childlike play attending the imminent dispossession of a sovereign people.

Gidley King's words echo the sentiment of Sir Joseph Banks who, seeing through the telescope the natives of Botany Bay for the first time in 1770 noted that they were all naked, including an old woman of whom he said "myself to the best of my judgement plainly discerned that the

woman did not copy our mother Eve even in the fig leaf."[3] Elsewhere Banks comments: "Of Cloths they had not the least part but naked as ever our general father was before his fall, they seemed no more conscious of their nakedness than if they had not been the children of Parents who eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge."[4] Banks's reference is to Chapter 3 of the Bible's Book of Genesis where Adam and Eve, having eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which God had forbidden them, discovered their nakedness and sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. It is clear that in the moment of first encounter the native people were placed with the most distant ancestors of modern man.

Influences

It is difficult to state which of the many painters whose work I admire has not had some influence on my own practice. Artists such as El Greco, Velazquez and Vermeer maintain a whispered background conversation, with Chardin and Friedrich. Other voices from the more immediate past supervene: those of Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Fauves, for instance. Of contemporary painters, I have been most affected by Giorgio Morandi, Stanley Spencer, Ian Fairweather, Howard Hodgkin, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Susan Norrie, and Ross Bleckner, and the Pintupi painters, at whose work I have spent a lot of time looking.

This list does not comprise a genealogy of my own present work: for better or worse I am nobody's disciple. In some cases what I admire about a particular painter is not so much the actual paintings as the attitude which they signify, or the sheer nerve of the vision. Sometimes I have no empathy at all with the painter's preoccupations, but find the performance, the use of the medium, to be magical.

Painting Materials

I am a painter and my principal interest is in making art objects which are two dimensional in form and use colour and texture to create meaning. By an art object I mean an object which is made to be looked at with a view to generating an aesthetic experience for the viewer. A successful art object is an act of communication. The communication is not necessarily between the maker and the viewer, since the maker has no control finally over the use to which the viewer may put the work and indeed the maker's intentions may be unknown. There is, nevertheless, a fictive maker with whom the viewer communicates. The idea of agency is fundamental to the idea of art. The brilliant sunset is a work of art only if one supposes it has a maker, it is not a work of art simply because it is perceived as colourful or impressive or even because it gives rise to an emotional response in the viewer. The death of Sardanapalus is not a work of art, but Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus* is. The death in prison of a member of the Baader-Meinhof gang is not in itself a work of art, except insofar as it might be a work of theatre, but Gerhard Richter's painting *18 Oktober 1977, 'Erschossener (1)'* certainly is.

The principal materials that I use are acrylic paint and oil paint applied to stretched and sealed canvas. Many other materials are available to the painter and I have used some of them where they have seemed appropriate. These include paper and cloth as collage elements, some with photocopied and printed images, and thread because it is what cloth is made of and because of its association with hair, and soil as a pigment and for texture. The grain of the surface is an important expressive element.

In the course of preparing the Dissertation component of my thesis I have made a close study of how Pintupi paintings are constructed. This has influenced my own painting process in the direction of simplicity of delivery and the use of a small repertoire of repeated images. My extensive use of stencils is a strategy to delay the inevitable emergence of the emotional self as the final subject of the work. It facilitates the initial establishment of information independent of the autographic brush mark. In this way a restrained and distanced ground can be established, with a pretension to objectivity, that is in itself an appropriately ironic comment in work concerned with history. Over this "independent" ground the textures and colours of paint are allowed to work their (my) opinions.

Stencils also simplify and make more emphatic the process of repetition within and between works. Repeated motifs have the effect of an incantation, like the simple rhythmic figures of minimalist music.

The resources of painting seem to serve two principal ends. One is for them to be themselves, that is for paint to be seen as paint, in knots and smears, as opaque or translucent, rough or smooth and of whatever colour and all this juxtaposed in whatever manner, and for cloth and paper elements to introduce their own textural and colour properties. The other is to create imagery, that is, to explicitly communicate some meaning other than or as well as the physical presence of the materials. High Modernism emphasised the first with its implicit meanings, whereas pre- and post-modern painting embraces both ends albeit using different strategies.

The ends are not necessarily as neatly separable as this formulation may make it seem. The materials inevitably import meaning, and this may be so strong as to create what can only be described as imagery, even when the painter explicitly denies agency. Perhaps this should cause no surprise since painters are, in the main, a self-selected group who have a concern with the expressive qualities of the medium in which they work, an innate sensitivity to nuances of two-dimensional form, colour and texture which is developed through years of practice. Behind the "intelligence of paint"[5] there is an element of animal delight, at its most exalted a kind of ecstasy, that is the force powering the communicative act of painting. A comparable force operates in the case of music.

"Painting" now has available to it an almost unrivalled latitude of means both traditional and untraditional and consequently a wider scope of provocation than the verbal arts. This latitude stretches from using objects or parts of objects literally to represent themselves (with whatever associative meanings the objects may import) through the visual metaphor of representation painted or otherwise, to the situation where there is no representation, only paint and possibly beyond even this, although the opposed poles of metaphor and metonym seem always to have a presence. The work of Anselm Kiefer comes to mind in this regard. In the case of the visual metaphor of painted representation, of whatever kind, highly refined suspensions of minerals are employed that trap the same parts of the spectrum of light rays as are trapped by the surface of whatever is being represented, with modifications for atmospheric effects (as with distant landscape). The point here is not to engage with technicalities of the physics of colour, but to

exemplify the riches available to the painter. The combinations, including modern reproductive technologies, provide a seemingly limitless resource.

Both intellect and emotions, assuming their separation for the moment, can be legitimate targets for acts of visual communication. The signs that are used for the communication, however they are classified, can provoke intellectual and/or emotional responses in the receiving intelligence. The response is perhaps most commonly one where the two are interwoven as where colour has an immediate emotional impact, but also provokes an intellectual appreciation of the spatial arrangements of relative proximity and distance, or where the intellectual recognition of an iconic element is accompanied by the emotional impact of its placement within a visual schema, employing certain colours, textures and so forth.

Visual Signs

I have an interest in the semiotics of painting. As a result my attention was aroused in the context of Western Desert painting by Nancy Munn's use of the term "iconography"[6] in relation to the signs used traditionally by the Walbiri, and Fred Myers's use of the term "iconic"[7] when discussing Pintupi painting. This led me back to the literature on the semiotics of painting. Ultimately I turned to the work which C.S. Peirce [8], the founder of semiotics, did on the concepts of icon, index and symbol, a useful framework for any consideration of visual signs as communication.

Briefly, by "icon" Peirce meant a sign which is a recognizable representation of its object, such as Van Gogh's painting of his room at Arles, and would look like the object even if the object ceased to exist. By "symbol" Peirce meant a sign which refers to its object in a conventional way as part of a system or code, which is used by an intelligence. A symbol can only be understood as a sign by an intelligence which knows the code. By an "index" Peirce meant a sign which refers to its object obliquely but has a direct physical connection with it, as when the bullet hole in the wall refers to the pistol shot, or the footprint in the sand refers to the human presence, or the movement of the weathercock refers to the wind. Peirce indicated that the categories might overlap and that where a sign belongs can only be determined by considering its major function. Rosalind Krauss [9]cites the interesting example of the photograph which looks like an iconic sign of its object, but which Peirce classed as an indexical sign because of the physical connection between the photograph and its object.

There is a sense in which the iconic sign dominates the visual field. To understand this one has only to think of the bullet hole as indexical sign of the gunshot and the picture of the bullet hole as an iconic sign whose object is the indexical sign of the gunshot. However it is productive of meaning to accept the supposed reality of the picture space and allow the signs a freer play within it.

That the symbolic sign refers to its object by way of a convention or code is easily understood, and the fact that it is a culturally determined relationship is obvious. One has only to think of the differing significance of white, red and black in Chinese, Japanese and European traditions concerning weddings and funerals. That the iconic sign is also to some extent culturally determined is less obvious. One is inclined to believe that a clearly depicted rose will be

recognised as such by anyone who has ever seen a rose and that the colours of the spectrum are distinguishable to all but the physically impaired. However early 20th century accounts of cross-cultural meetings sometimes record the intense puzzlement of persons seeing for the first time their own two-dimensional image, and Berlin and Kay [10] have produced provocative material suggesting that some languages do not distinguish as many colours as others and that the number is linked to social development. Whether things can be perceived but not named is beyond the scope of the Berlin and Kay study. Despite the fact that the distinction between icon and symbol has a tendency to slip, these signs have always played an important role in painting and continue to do so. Indexicality is a more problematic, and at the same time the most productive sign. It has tended to dominate painting during the 20th century.

As with the other members of the fundamental triad of signs, the boundaries of indexicality are not easily established. Thus, the bright light in Gainsborough's outdoor portrait of Mr and Mrs Andrews may be an iconic presentation of summer sunlight or an indexical sign of a summer's day. It also operates as a symbolic sign of their pride of possession and seems like an indexical sign of this mood, as though the sunlight grew out of their confidence. The raking illumination of Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* indicates the sun low on the horizon, and to that extent it is indexical. Whether this is dawn or sunset is not clear, and each has a different symbolic meaning, the one implying a beginning, the other an ending. If it is evening, the light may be an index of despair as the tiny distant vessel, to whom the castaways desperately signal, sails away into night. If it is morning, the light may be an index of the rising hope of rescue.

It may be that the pressure that is conveyed by the cramped environment of the figures in Roger van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* (c 1435) , is an index of the extreme grief which the painter wished to convey. This same grief is otherwise expressed iconicly through tears and gestures expressive of misery, not least the Virgin's ashen-faced collapse, but the compressed space within the picture is the indexical sign of the choked atmosphere of extreme misery. The same sign is at work in Pontormo's *Deposition* (1525) where the pale sharp colours and the agitation of the crowded figures and their robes, create a sense of intense emotionality.

As the examples make clear, the iconic element of the sign involves technical mastery for its delivery, and the symbolic requires the manipulation of codes, but the indexical element is often what delivers the central meaning to a work. During the 20th century the attention of many painters has focussed more intensively on the materials and surface of painting and has concerned itself less with the trompe-l'oeil aspects of representation than at any time in the previous seven to eight hundred years. The reign of the iconic sign has, to this extent, given way to the symbolic and the indexical.

These considerations have been important in helping me to focus my own practice and I return again to them at the end of this report.

Process

My research was concerned with identifying issues of cross-cultural communication arising from the Aboriginal-European interface which could successfully be explored in painting. This involved an examination of historical material, the clarification of my own emotional response to the

material and the identification of the means with which to communicate. The process was a tangled one, sometimes involving exploratory works, like the testing of hypotheses, some of which opened new meanings and gave access to emotions the relevance of which I did not always grasp at the outset. These works have often taken the form of a short series. Each had its own validity, but not all of them have yet been explored fully. For the purposes of my final presentation I have shown a body of work which I think fairly represents this process.

Perhaps the use of the term 'hypothesis' in this context is misleading because it suggests a clearly stated initial proposition the validity of which is experimentally tested with a view to validating it. However my work is more like developing a set of nested meanings which extend outward or inward through a process of supposition. The materials themselves are part of those meanings. There is no straightforward developmental path from early to late works, nor is there a progression from small to large formats. the small works are not maquettes for the large; rather, the size of each work results from a decision about how it will function.

Just as the painter's mind is sometimes flooded at the outset with the desire for a particular colour or combination of colours before other elements of the work have formed themselves, in a similar way the scale of a work may emerge at the moment when the first decisions are being taken. Some paintings require the intimacy of small dimensions, like the space of a private conversation. Others are more like public speaking and correspondingly larger. The importance of what is done does not necessarily correlate with the size. One thinks of van Eyck's *The Madonna of Chancellor Rolin, 66 x 61.9 cm.*, Vermeer's *Maidservant Pouring Milk*, 45.4 x 41 cm., Cezanne's *Cardplayers*, 47.5 x 57 cm. Derain's *Portrait of Vlaminck*, 41 x 33 cm. and all the early work from Papunya Tula.

Some of my previous work involved enlarging the mark of the 19th century steel engraved line to make painted images dealing with Australian colonial history. There came a point in this work where I considered moving further "in" to explore the space created within the even further enlarged line. However, I drew back at this point from what would have been a step in the direction of late abstract expressionism. My reason was that it was too subjective an approach to facilitate communication, involving what might best be called an idiolectic means of expression. Because of its concentration on self-expression, it seemed likely to cut me off from further exploring and using historical material. However, as the project has matured, I have again been drawn in the direction of materials as subject matter.

Traditional Aboriginal Australian society believes in the ability of man to access the power that operates the universe through the use of painted designs and the repetition of traditional verbal formulae or songs, and by these means to influence outcomes. As a sceptical European I do not believe this at all. For me the universe is desacrilized, but I see a parallel in the power of the human intellect to affect human destiny in the face of an indifferent cosmos. For the painter that power is exercised primarily through the language of paint which expresses meanings that are not available otherwise, and in the creation of images which act powerfully on the viewer. The materials of painting, like the words of other languages, are a means of expression in their own right and a powerful source of communication when combined.

All of this concerns the *how* of the matter and does not directly reveal the *what*, and we are strongly disposed by the kind of rationality which underpins Western European thought to seek the *what*. However the *what* in painting is intimately bound up with the *how*, and to a greater extent perhaps than in other forms such as verbal communication. There, although the choice of a particular vocabulary (high or low) and, in the case of published material, the choice of typeface, layout, paper and binding can influence meaning, the power of the word in communication is so strong that at some level it seems always to overcome these other considerations. With painting, other than in its most didactic, storytelling form, paint is the dominant issue.

Because I am overtly concerned to communicate a complex set of ideas, I normally employ a number of means at once. This is not to suggest that the work should be approached like an acrostic or a cryptic puzzle, with a series of keys to be identified and then applied in order to open successive doors to meaning. I intend rather that the key notions in my work should be readily identifiable, so that on this ground of broad comprehension, the aesthetic qualities of the work can hold the viewer's attention long enough for other questions, embedded in the detail, to come to attention.

Issues into Imagery

Initially, building on the work which I had done before, I attempted to develop imagery that dealt with the moment of impact between the colonisers and the indigenous population, by using the appearance of the engraved line enlarged to the thickness of the lines in Aboriginal body decoration . This I thought might be expanded even further so that the lines themselves became an evocation of the land, sea and sky paralleling the Aboriginal world view. I experimented in some of these works with paint comprising soil held with a fixative. Although the use of particulate material produced a surface evocative of the harsh dryness and breadth of inland Australia, the reference to engraved lines was not strong. In those works where the lines remained visible as the source of the imagery, they took on the appearance of contour lines evoking a sense of the land (and metaphorically the Aboriginal people) enduring through the period of European settlement (Fig. 1). This was not a totally unsatisfactory way of approaching the subject matter, but again, the reference to European engraving had become obscure. However, central to the concept which I was trying to evoke was the notion that the European vision through which the colonisers inevitably saw the new land prevented them from seeing what great injury they were doing to it and its native inhabitants. Thinking about this problem of expression clarified for me that the subject I wanted to deal with was the interface of radically different societies meeting for the first time.

Having read Gidley King's account of the first meeting with its tragicomic scene with the handkerchief, I began a series of paintings with images of colonial figures transferred to handkerchief-sized squares of fabric which were embedded in a sepia coloured surface on canvas. The surface was embellished with patterns laid under the paint in the gesso layer like the cicatrice designs on the skins of the Port Jackson Aborigines portrayed in the earliest European paintings of the colony. The cicatrice patterns were also reminiscent of the broad arrow and of the way waves at sea were portrayed in colonial paintings of the period.

In 1996 I saw an exhibition of work by Janenne Eaton called *Terra Australis - selected views* which used, among other devices, the broad arrow and fern leaf as repeated pattern element with which to construct works reflecting on aspects of the British penal colony in Australia together with the use of sand in panels which evoked the land and the indigenous people. I felt a sympathy with Eaton's work, which seemed to be placed somewhere between the rigours of minimalist pattern making and a more discursive re-presentation of historical material. While I have not consciously sought to imitate this work, I believe it has exercised an influence on my thinking and this was confirmed when I saw an exhibition of Eaton's more recent work last year, particularly the paintings concerned with the anti-Chinese riots at Lambing Flat. However it had a degree of resolution and an air of graphic accomplishment which is slightly at odds with my own sense of unease about the subject matter of the European presence in Australia. I concluded that my concerns could not be expressed fully through the conventions of modernism and required a less resolved manner. A central issue for my work is to explore the difficulty which the hegemonic tendency embedded in modernism and the whole enlightenment project presents for cross-cultural understanding and respect. This pushes my practice towards postmodern strategies of quotation and bricolage.

I experimented with the motif of the fig leaf (Fig. 2), which featured in Gidley King's account, to evoke a sense of the clash of moralities embedded in the first meeting of the two cultures. Sometimes the leaf replaced other images of the invader. Not inappropriately, it tended to look like a ship under full sail. In another work in this series, the face of Captain Arthur Philip appears with fig leaves against a background of words taken from 18th century social commentary and reproduced in the style of 18th century handwriting.

The words I used came from two sources. One was Rousseau's The Social Contract which was first published in 1762. This was, and still is, an influential work of political philosophy in which Rousseau sets out his view on how it is that the State can be seen as a legitimate governing body with certain powers over the lives of individuals. Rousseau is one of the thinkers whose speculations contributed to the social upheavals which began with the French Revolution and plagued the aristocratic regimes of Europe during the 19th and early 20th centuries. "The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty".[11] The major point of Rousseau's social contract theory was that a legitimate society exists because of the consent of the people and that this society acts by popular will. Individual wills, he maintains, are not self-sufficient and separate, but interdependent. The individual obeys the general will, not because of external force, but because the general will exists within the individual. According to Rousseau, the State is not an accident of history devised for the protection of person and possessions, but is an outgrowth of human nature. To Rousseau the State was natural and the "state of nature" to which earlier theorists such as Thomas Hobbes had referred, was an abstraction. Rousseau's writing is part of the background to the events of 1788.

Some passages, such as the following from The Social Contract Bk. 1, Ch IX, have a poignant relevance to the colonial situation:

> The right of the first occupier, though more real than the right of the strongest, becomes a real right only when the right of property has been established. Every man has naturally a right to

> everything he needs; but the positive act which makes him proprietor of one thing excludes him from everything else. Having his share, he ought to keep to it, and can have no further right against the community. This is why the right of the first occupier, which in the state of nature is so weak, claims the respect of every man in civil society. In this right we are respecting not so much what belongs to another as what does not belong to ourselves.[12]

and also to the issues of unauthorised immigration which beset many countries at present:

> How can a man or a people seize an immense territory and keep it from the rest of the world except by a punishable usurpation, since all others are being robbed, by such an act, of the place of habitation and the means of subsistence which nature gave them in common.[13]

The other source I used was Soame Jenyns's A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil published in 1757. A Christian moralist, Jenyns was a member of the British parliament for thirty-eight years. Although the Free Inquiry was roundly criticised by Samuel Johnson in the Literary Magazine, it enjoyed a considerable vogue.[14] The work sets out to justify the presence of evil in the world in view of God's omnipotence. Sentiments such as the following quotations from Jenyns therefore form part of the 18th century background:

> It would no more have been an instance of God's wisdom to have created no Beings but of the highest and most perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art, to cover his whole piece with one single colour the most beautiful he could compose. Had he confined himself to such, nothing could have existed but demi-gods, or archangels, and then all inferior orders must have been void. [15]

> Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial administered by the gracious hand of Providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper Education. It is the basis of all subordination, the support of society, and the privilege of individuals: and I have ever thought it a most remarkable instance of the Divine Wisdom, that whereas in all animals, whose individuals rise little above the rest of their species, knowledge is instinctive; in Man, whose individuals are so widely different, it is acquired by education; by which means the Prince and the Labourer, the Philosopher and the Peasant, are in some measure fitted for their respective situations.[16]

The words formed a frame of reference within which the Aboriginal presence was perceived.

The Painting Project

Initially I divided the work I intended to create into three series of paintings. The first I thought should be called *Seeing the Land*, the second, *Meeting the People* and the third *Settling the Social Relations*. In fact I have worked back and forth across these divisions with successive iterations of the material.

Beginning with the first series, *Seeing the Land*, I at first worked on a ground comprising a collage of photocopies of a painting I had made based on the head of Balloderree in the Port Jackson Painter's portrait of him. I arranged the repeated images of the head to make the shape of an island. Over this I stencilled interweaving patterns of "archetypal" native flora such as waratah and wattle, and an occasional parrot, to create an effect reminiscent of 18th century fabric. As the series went on I dispensed with the photocopied under-layer and stencilled the images in oil paint directly onto the canvas. These works were mainly 80 cm x 70 cm.

Part of what I wanted to express was that the colonists had no option but to see the new land in terms of their own preconceptions. This was principally because it is how all but the most exceptional minds work, but it was also because of the nature of the colonising enterprise. Despite the British Government's instructions to Arthur Philip that he was to negotiate with the native people, not simply dispossess them, this proved impossible because there was no Aboriginal group or individual of overall authority, with whom to reach an agreement. The identification of the Aborigines with the land was not understood at all, and if it had been, was a position in direct conflict with the colonists' aims. That is why the Aboriginal heads are the land in this series of paintings and it is why they are barely perceptible under the patterned overlay.(Fig. 3)

I wanted these paintings to convey some sense of a breathless moment of hush as the unsuspecting island lies in the sea and the invaders approach: the brink of an unimaginable disaster. I also wanted the paintings to convey the sense of excited anticipation which must have attended the event (on both sides), but tinged with melancholy for our knowledge of the outcome. Here was the early cartographers' *Terra Australis Incognita,* at first unknown and merely imagined, then known but inadequately imagined. I explored the idea in a variety of moods, from the fanciful image of an earthly paradise to a gaping maw waiting to consume the unwary colonists and the native people. The *Island of the Dead* was suggested as a possible resource: by the 19th century Swiss painter, Arnold Böcklin, this work has a haunted, high romantic, poetic quality, which might provide a means to realize some of my concerns about the initial colonial moment.

In fact this opened an area of work which was both helpful and a distraction. I made several large versions of the island, varying in size from 1.5 m x 2 m to 2 m x 3 m. In some it glittered brightly on the waves, in others it lay in wait somberly. The colonist's ships approached as fragile butterflies (a reference to Edward Lorenz's 'Butterfly Effect'). I then moved, via the reference to Böcklin, to make use of other well known works, this time on the subject of Christ's Passion. The first, *Transit of Venus - Kiss of Judas* (Fig, 4) was based on Giotto's *Kiss of Judas* which I adapted to the notion of Enlightenment science betraying the South Pacific through Cook's voyage to observe the transit of Venus. Another related to a Velazquez' *Crucifixion* referring to the fate of the native people and ultimately the land itself, and a third related to the *Deposition* attributed to Roger van der Weyden, again referring to the dispossessed. In each case I used the layout of the original work, with the iconography translated into the iconography which I had developed through works in the series *Seeing the Land* . I intended that sufficient would remain of the original to cause some of the meaning and emotional impact of that painting to be imported into my work. These were all large works (2 m x 2.5 m)

I considered expanding this line of enquiry to produce a series of works which might have employed in some way the sequence of the Stations of the Cross. However, combined with the notion of importing content from major European paintings, the methodology seemed too heavily burdened with historical and other references to be productive. The series ended with *Handkerchief* (Fig. 5), a relatively small and simple reference to El Greco's *St Veronica.*

There is an irony about the role of cloth. It facilitated the discovery and the colonial invasion of Australia in the age of sail. (Norfolk Island was occupied for its supposed resources of pine for masts and flax for canvas very soon after Port Jackson) and cloth fascinated the Aborigines who gladly accepted it for decorative and other uses. Not having experienced anything like this before, they had no idea what the cloth would cost them. There has been the suggestion that the much-prized blankets provided by the colonial authorities became a vector spreading the European diseases which wiped out a huge number of natives, beginning in 1789 with smallpox. It is not certain that the blankets played a significant role in the spread of smallpox, since the main route of entry for the disease is inhalation of an airborne virus that initially establishes a respiratory infection [17]. However, the virus can survive outside its human host for long periods, and the concept of disease spreading blankets remains a powerful symbol of the charity of colonization. The very texture of woven stuff used in work relating to these events evokes the meshes of rumour and human failure. Over and above these basic concerns is the matter of 18th century sensibility which is reflected in the woven silk designs which European men and women used for personal adornment. I have taken these designs as a metaphoric representation of the European presence.

This was the starting point in 1999 for a group of works which I called *Meeting the People.* These sometimes showed aboriginal figures transformed by the European gaze into an amalgam of animal and floral forms (Fig. 6) with something of the feeling of 18th century "bizarre" silk patterns, in their hints of chinoiserie and japonaiserie. In some of these works I employed the optical effect of simultaneous contrast, with its unavoidable colour illusion, to underline the idea that the viewer cannot escape to an objective position from which to view the "other". In other works in the series I contrasted European and Aboriginal concepts of personal decoration (Fig. 7), which in the case of the European element gave me an opportunity to use simultaneous contrast again in "quoting" striped silk.

I was aware that the most elaborate "bizarre" patterns in woven silk really belonged to the first decade of the 18th century and that by the time of Cook's first voyage to the Pacific, which took him to Australia in 1770, pastel coloured sprigs, wreathes and rosettes combined with stripes, in a style known as neoclassical, were predominant. By 1788, colours were slightly darker, but patterns generally remained small and were becoming increasingly abstract towards the end of the century. Nevertheless, throughout the 18th century meandering trails of ribbons and garlands, simulated feathers, lace and even knitting make their appearance in woven silk, sometimes with *trompe-l'oeil* effects. I have made reference to the full range of patterns to evoke an 18th century feeling including the more elaborate early designs, with their use of gold and silver thread in a series of small works, made in 2001, dealing with the moment of invasion and the penetration of one culture by another (Fig. 8).

I wanted to introduce an unmistakably Aboriginal presence at the same time as making it quite clear that I was not attempting to speak for the Aborigines or to interpret events from an Aboriginal perspective. With this in mind, and also because of the historical flavour of my work, I chose again to quote the work of the Port Jackson painter, in particular the portraits of Balloderree and Bennelong. From this material I developed a series of paintings in oil on canvas with some additional collaged elements of fabric. They ranged in size from 80 x 70 cm to 29 x 24 cm. All these works contained the image of an Aboriginal person, in some cases printed onto gauze which was glued to the canvas, or in others painted directly. Handwritten text was incorporated in a glaze layer and in some cases symbols of imperial power and stylised native flowers were superimposed as stencilled elements. The text used was from Rousseau and Jenyns. Here I presented the Aborigine perceiving through the mesh of the English language, perceived through a mesh of sentiments concerning the rights of man, and receiving, like a royal seal, the fatal gift of European diseases.

While it was legitimate enough to assert, in this work about the meeting of European and Aboriginal society, the importance of the texts and the sentiments they embody, it seemed to me on reflection that these works employed too much that was extrinsic to painting and not enough of the resources unique to non-verbal visual communication. Using the texts, written in an 18th century hand, and delivered onto the canvas in the grid format that was sometimes used by letter-writers at the time to save paper, was a rather too literal presentation of the concept that the sentiments expressed were the grid with which events at the time were put into perspective: the framework of sentiment used as a visual framework (Fig. 9). The experiment underlined for me the difficulty of using words in paintings where the words have to be read at any length. The difficulty seems to reside in a conflict between the language of paint and verbal language which so dominates human communication. I came to believe that the work was sliding in the direction of slogan based poster art and television graphics. The layering of messages in differing modes and the very transparency of the images delivered in thin paint layers (some of the images being transferred photocopies of photographs) added to this effect. I wanted a more painterly methodology for the expression of my concerns.

An additional problem was that the text was somewhat obscure, but at the same time the narrative of the work (once the key was obtained) was explicitly didactic and rather obvious. There was not enough space in the work for the viewer. It was too much of a one-way act of communication, bordering on the circular in its gloomy monochromatic presentation of gloomy events. It is a Pyrrhic victory of painting to deal with an unattractive subject by making a painting which is itself an unattractive object. The visual strategy is easily grasped, and leaves the viewer satisfied not to see the work more than once.

I began in 2000 the series of works which I called *Settling the Social Relations.* These grew out of *Meeting the People*. A transitional sequence of work concerned contrasted forms of personal decoration, Aboriginal and European. The series went on to examine aspects of the dominance which European settlers began to exert over Aboriginal society. Images of Aborigines by the Port Jackson Painter were superseded by photographic images of Aboriginal women, dressed in European clothing. These images I printed on fine lawn which I fringed and decorated with drawn thread work, referring to the subtle way in which the values of one society are infiltrated and

supplanted by those of another. In some, lace and embroidered butterflies and vegetation took the place of superimposed stencilled designs of native species. In others the Aboriginal figures were juxtaposed with imagery derived from an 18th century Caughley tea bowl decoration (Fig. 10) and from the small scale patterns of late 18th century silk with its shimmer like that of the scales on a butterfly's wing. The native species here begin their absorption into the decoration of European industrial products, just as the indigenous people who are in close proximity to the European settlement are drawn under the sway of a transplanted European culture. Places are found for some of them in servitude of one kind or another.

Looking over what I have done I see that my process has been iterative. I have stated and restated questions about the European presence in this place, which are really questions about how people should relate to one another: those questions of cross-cultural communication and mutual esteem with which I began. Thus in 2001 I revisited the moments of first encounter in a late series of works blending the first European images of the Port Jackson Aborigines with eighteenth century fabric designs, particularly from military uniforms. These images were printed on silk and glued to canvas, sometimes underpainted and sometimes painted into. The technique caused the images to hover below the picture surface in a way which served to underline their status as other histories, somewhere between fact and fiction. Other elements in the work establish a plane above these images, pushing them back into the past, a notion which is emphasised by the foxy colour. These elements include grids and gold squares referencing the invasion and also, in the larger works, referring in a subdued way to the oriental origins of the European fabric designs (Fig. 11).

In another series begun towards the end of 2000 and continued throughout 2001, my attention was given to making work which embodied my sense of the process of making history more than the individual events of that history which had preoccupied me previously. In doing this I relied much more heavily on the ability of paint to communicate directly with the viewer (Fig. 12). Quotation of other images has given way, in the case of the Aboriginal presence, to a head-like structure, through which the stencilled rose grows (Fig. 13). In some works the European presence overwhelms the picture space like as a giant cascade of blue roses. Seemingly-solid structures fade into transparency and the reality behind events takes on a solid painted form, only to give way again to fathomless depth. Different concepts of reality face one another in a surreal conflict. The tears of paint run and catch on clots of meaning. Finally the body of the land, which began as an Aboriginal presence, becomes the body of the colonial invader (Fig 14). Decorative sprigs and trails, escaping from their origins, spread out from the harbours which are opened in the land like incisions. The colours conduct their own invasion. Certainties about one's place in the world dissolve, and one is left clinging to a kind of truth which painting is.

Meaning is delivered, at one level, through the presence of iconic signs such as the flowers and human faces. Some of these provoke further meanings through a symbolic function, as does colour. A third level of meaning is established through indexical signs of the painterly process such as the directional flow and texture of paint, in opaque and transparent contrast, which in turn create meaning as symbolic signs. The power of visual communication lies in its simultaneous use of these elements.

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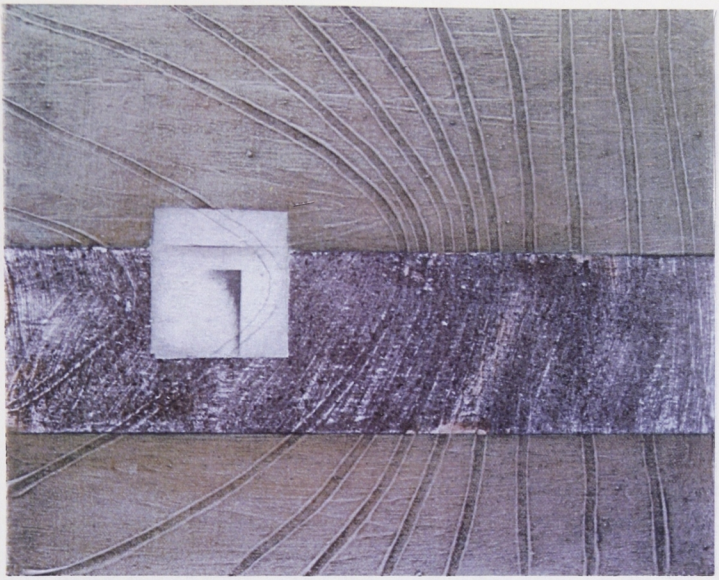

Fig. 1.
Land, 1998,
oil & earth
pigment
on canvas,
29 x 24 cm.

Fig.2,
Seeing Eden, 1998,
printed muslin
& oil on canvas
70 x 80 cm.

Fig.3.
Seeing the Land, 1998,
photocopied images on paper
& oil on canvas,
70 x 80 cm.

Fig.4.
Transit of Venus
- Kiss of Judas, 2000,
acrylic & oil on canvas,
245 x 154 cm. (Detail)

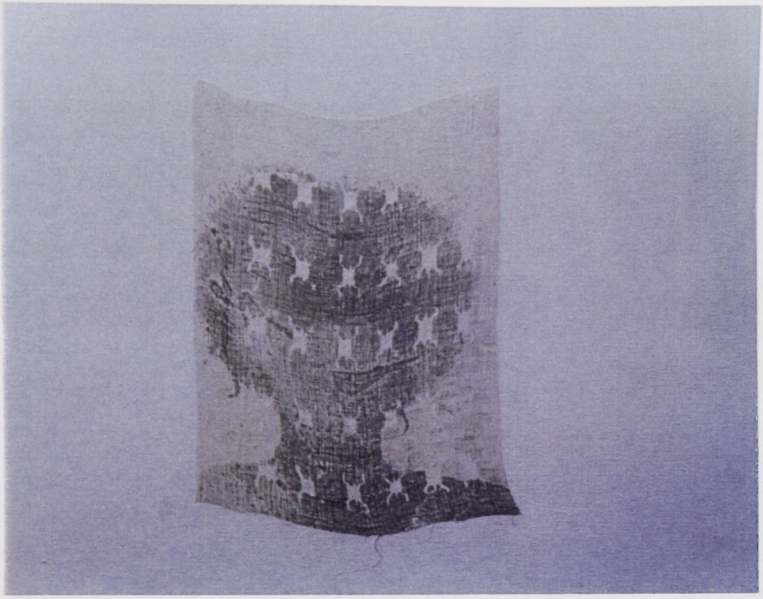

Fig.5.
Handkerchief, 2000,
printed muslin
on canvas,
60 x 48 cm.

Fig.6.
Meeting Indians, 1999,
oil on canvas,
100 x 70 cm

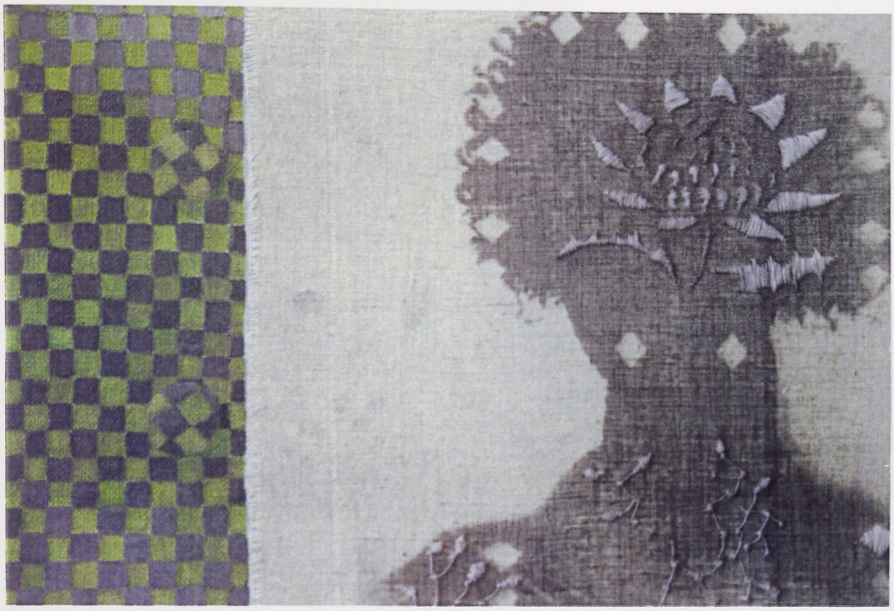

Fig.7.
Meeting the Man, 1999,
printed muslin with embroidery
& oil on canvas,
34 x 46 cm.

Fig. 8.
Encounter no 12, 2001,
acrylic on canvas
on board,
33.5 x 30.5 cm.

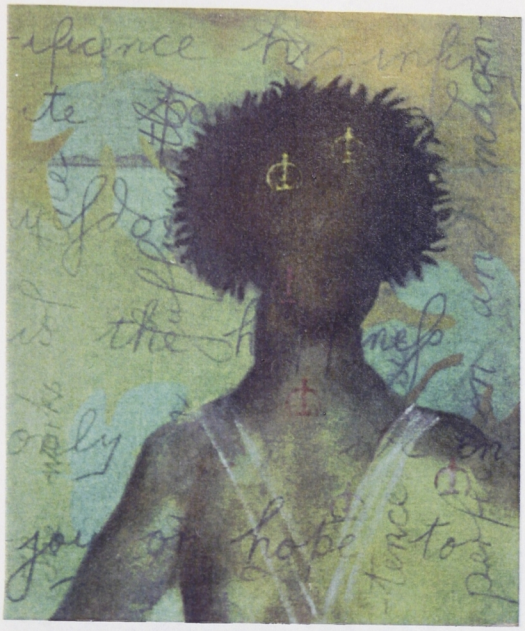

Fig.9.
Colonial Framework, 1999,
oil on canvas,
40 x 35 cm.

Fig.10.
Settling, 2000,
printed muslin, embroidery
& oil on canvas,
30 x 50 cm.

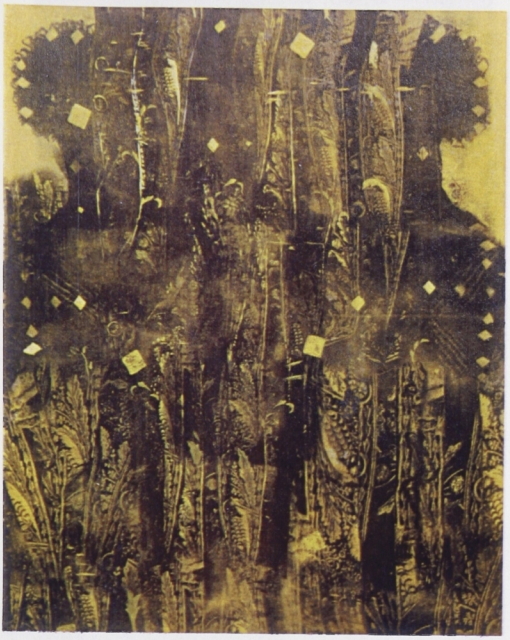

Fig.11.
Larger Colonial Subject,
2001,
printed silk
& acrylic on canvas,
110 x 90 cm.

Fig.12.
History, 2001,
acrylic on canvas,
150 x150 cm. (Detail)

Fig. 13
Colonial Prospect, 2000,
acrylic on canvas,
60 x 50 cm.

Fig. 14.
Opening the Country,
2001,
acrylic on canvas
85 x 70 cm.